



Portraits of Patriotism

“Freedom Bridge”

FOR more than four decades (1945 to 1991) the Cold War pitted a United States-led alliance defending democracy and freedom against a Soviet Union-spearheaded quest to impose communism on the world. In this hair-trigger environment, America’s commitment was tested repeatedly. While the two superpowers usually avoided direct military confrontation in the Cold War, hot wars by proxy flared throughout the world. Two of these, Korea and Vietnam, drew a sustained American military response.

In Europe, Berlin was the epicenter of these East-West tensions, which on many occasions threatened to boil over into open conflict. U.S. forces played an essential part in maintaining peace in that long-divided city — from the Berlin Airlift of the 1940s through the building of the Berlin Wall in the 1960s until the city was reunited in 1990.

This Edward Reep watercolor painting, “Freedom Bridge,” depicts Glienicker Bridge, connecting the southwest outskirts of Berlin with Potsdam over the Havel River. Manned by gun-toting guards on the East German side, the bridge became famous as a spot for spy exchanges, most notably that involving American U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers and Soviet spy Rudolf Abel. By preserving a toehold of freedom in the Allied zones of Berlin at places such as the Glienicker Bridge and Checkpoint Charlie, American soldiers were sentinels of freedom.

Soldiers of the U.S. Army on the ground in Europe, Korea, Vietnam and dozens of lonely outposts around the world provided tangible proof that the United States would sustain its friends against communist tyranny. On an individual level, soldiers generated goodwill as ambassadors of American values by demonstrating to host nations and aggressors alike the proper role for the military in a democratic society. More than half a century later, American soldiers still defend our nation’s interests globally and serve abroad as an effective force for international security and peace. — *CPT Patrick Swan*

